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ABSTRACT

The failure of many international development projects is prompting project planners and implementers to reexamine the process of technological transfer between countries. This process involves one culture imposing change upon another in such a way that the recipient culture not only accepts the change but also adopts it as its own and expands upon it. This paper suggests that major factors in the success of international development projects are: (1) agreement on project objectives among the donor agency, national government, and project participants; (2) "ownership" of the project by participants; and (3) willingness of participants to change and flexibility of cultural systems to permit such change. The change agent should become a facilitator of the cross-cultural change process by acting as a bridge between the differing realities of participants and others. A good facilitator can empathize with others intellectually and emotionally, shift between paradigms easily, and perceive interrelationships in new ways. The facilitator can assist small cooperative groups of participants to identify needs and problems, to integrate solutions into the development project, and to achieve good two-way communication with project staff. This paper contains 16 references. (SV)

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CHANGE IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

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INTRODUCTION

International development projects have been thought of as primarily a technological transfer process in which technology (tools, equipment, hardware) and the information necessary for its operation and use are transferred from a more progressive, tehnologically advanced country to that of a less sophisticated, developing country. There is a stated assumption that this transfer will act for the good of the recipient culture and economically benefit it, and often an unstated assumption that the transfer will also economically benefit the donor country. As many development projects have not reached their projected objectives or worse have caused actual harm to the recipient country, project planners and implementers have examined the process more closely.

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[1] The author worked with the "Small-scale Livestock for Rural Farming Women Project" from July through December 1985, preparing and presenting videotapes on technical aspects of pig keeping to the project participants and evaluating the effectiveness of these videotape programs as a communication tool. This work was done as a research study for an Interdisciplinary Master's degree through New Mexico State University and was supported financially by an Inter-American Foundation Fellowship, a Women in Development (AID) Fellowship, and a Title VI Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship for Latin America through the Center for Latin American Studies at New Mexico State University. The views expressed in this paper are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the views, or opinions of the awarding organizations.

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This paper discusses the identification, communication, and integration of recipients' needs, problems and desires into international development projects and seeks to explore ways and suggest mechanisms that would facilitate such.

The blame for unsuccessful projects was first placed upon the recipients' inability to adopt introduced changes or upon the project planners for not taking into account all of the unforeseen factors that might affect the success of such a project. In an attempt to remedy this situation, the content of the technical information, the way in which it was communicated, and/or the equipment itself was modified so that it was more appropriate to the recipient culture and more easily adapted. Although one could never take into account all of the multitudinous factors that could affect an international development project, including natural disasters and changes in governments, planners and project implementers tried to be aware of more of the cultural factors that could jeopardize the success of a project. Failures have continued, however, and there has been a growing realization that the process involved is not simply one of technological transfer, but the very complicated process of one culture imposing change upon another in such a way that the recipient culture not only accepts such change but adopts it as its own and expands upon it. When dealing cross culturally it is much too simplistic to view the process as merely a transfer of technological information and equipment.

A successful development project is defined as one that meets

the objectives set for it and that continues beyond the period of time that the project is receiving donor funding. For this to happen, long term behavioral change on the part of the recipients must occur. One common factor in successful international development projects appears to be that the recipients' needs have been taken into account and that there has been an opportunity for meaningful communication and resultant action between recipients and project personnel, (Harrison 1987; O'Sullivan-Ryan and Kaplun, 1981; Wickramasinghe, 1982). Although many projects pay lip service to the inclusion of feedback from recipients, few projects actually possess mechanisms for allowing feedback or integrate such feedback into the implementation of the project. Before recipients' suggestions can be incorporated into development projects there must first be agreement on at least the stated objectives of the project, from the donor agency's, the recipient government's and the recipients' points of views. Secondly, there must be the belief on the part of project personnel and the recipients that the recipients can actually contribute something to the development and implementation of the project and that their suggestions are worth listening to and incorporating into the project. This belief is enhanced if there is a mechanism for twoway communication from the beginning stages of planning through toe end of donor funding for the project. Thirdly, the participants must be willing to change their behavior. There must be a sufficient level of dissatisfaction with the status quo to make change acceptable, and sufficient flexibility in the

individual, group, culture, and society to permit the encoding of new information and the integration of that information into previously acquired knowledge, even though the amount of initial disorder or discomfort increases.

If one accepts the above statements as true, then the roles of project personnel and participants need to be redefined and the process that must be examined and understood is that of two way change. Instead of focussing exclusively on the transfer of technological information and equipment, development projects should concentrate on giving project recipients the skills and tools to define and solve problems as they occur and change over time.

IDENTIFICATION OF RECIPIENTS' NEEDS

Many international development projects are targeted towards subsistence level people who are often on the lowest rungs of the world's economic ladders. Precisely because of their economic status, these people often demonstrate low self esteem and a disbelief that they are able to initiate any change in their lives that will work towards their good. If the success of a development project is dependent upon the participants' ability to define needs, solve problems, initiate and sustain change, input into project planning, and implement and adopt project goals, then it is essential that the first step of any development project is oriented towards raising the participants' self-esteem and problem defining and solving abilities.

Some development projects have recognized this as an important first step and as a result have established small cooperative groups with a project mentoring facilitator such as those described in Kindervatter's Women Working Together (1983). One of the first activities of the facilitators of Kindervatter's cooperative groups is to recognize, legitimize and respect the members' varying points of view and opinions and to encourage the verbalization and acceptance of each of the members' experiences, values, beliefs and realities. This reinforcement and empowerment is critical to developing the members' self confidence and an attitude that they are able to change their lives for the better. Other activities focus on defining resources in the group, cooperative problem defining and solving, and decision making. It appears that the more successful projects have begun by organizing participants into cooperative groups and working with those members through group dynamic processes to enhance their self esteem and their ability to collectively identify and solve problems. Even in development projects where such groups have been established; however, more attention should be given to the qualifications, skills, and training of the project facilitators or change agents. It appears that the change agent is critical to the successful formation and operation of the cooperative groups and thus to the success of the project.

The Facilitator

What are the characteristics of a good facilitator? A change agent

is often viewed as the expert who transfers information in a one way communication, who holds the right "reality" and who makes moralistic judgments that condemn other ways of seeing and acting in the world. A facilitator should be the opposite. S/he must be able to see and empathize with other people's realities and act as a bridge between differing realities.

All communication is conveyed and interpreted through individual perceptual filters which are formulated by beliefs, values, emotions, experiences, cultural systems, and context. These filters define an individual's reality or paradigm. Since these filters are not stagnant but change over time and circumstance, paradigms are adjusted as need be to interpret one's own experiences. This appears to happen more quickly and more often if one is exposed to somewhat differing paradigms. For information to be communicable, however, it must be at least somewhat acceptable to the belief, value, and cultural systems of the receiver. If paradigms are too dissimilar, the content of the communication can never get past the filters.

Some people are able to operate in more that one paradigm at a time or to shift between several paradigms. They are able to suspend absolute moral judgments about other paradigms, but do make relativistic ethical and practical judgments about the validity of certain paradigms. A facilitator should be such a person who can recognize different people's realities as different but equal, although certain realities may be more adaptive and thus "better" in certain situations or at a given time. A facilitator should be

someone who is able to bridge paradigms by shifting among them. This skill seems dependent upon the ability to empathize with others intellectually and emotionally. The facilitator's capacity to shift paradigms enables them to perceive interrelationships in new ways, identify cognitive patterns that permit larger problem identification and problem solving space, and integrate previous knowledge with new information in building block fashion. A facilitator should explore new possibilities and express ways of looking at things in contexts which are understandable from varying points of view. This person continually seeks compromise solutions which are acceptable to all parties. A facilitator needs good interpersonal, communication and negotiating skills, the ability to empathize with others, enough self esteem and self confidence that s/he is not threatened by others, and the ability to reason at an intellectually sophisticated level. A facilitator must be flexible, and non-dogmatic, but possess the ability to seek, identify and unite others to pursue a common goal.

There are no precise measurement scales to determine if someone has all of these attributes, but there are some cognitive and psychological tests available that indicate the presence of some of these attributes, (Commons, Richards & Armon, 1984; Rankin and Allen, 1991; Sinnott, 1989.) Through training programs for potential facilitators it would be possible to select out inappropriate people and to impart at least some of the above-mentioned skills. The selection of change agents and development project personnel have been made for a number of reasons including

political and economical; perhaps it is time to reevaluate those reasons and rethink what qualifications are essential, necessary and desirable.

TWO WAY COMMUNICATION

Communication within development projects has traditionally been a one way transfer from the top down (Rogers, 1983). Yet if we examine how adults learn and why long term behavioral change occurs, it becomes clear that two way communication is essential to this process (Johnson, 1991). Two way communication, Freire's (1971) "dialogue" in the introduction of information and the application of such information to daily living seems critical for the adult learner to assimilate and integrate such information into their ongoing reality. For long term behavioral change to occur a person must be able to wed not only the factual information into previously known facts and concepts, but also to incorporate and internalize the underlying belief and value systems that accompany such information into the already existent belief, value, and cultural systems embedded in experience and emotion which comprise that person's cognitive structure or paradigm. In many development projects this does not happen and as soon as the funding stops and the outside motivation for change stops, the project ceases and life returns to what existed before the introduction of the development project.

It is precisely because belief and value systems are not static entities that two way communication between the

participant/facilitator or learner/teacher seems to be necessary if complex change is to become internalized. It must be a give and take process in which the ultimate goal is a compromise position and the roles of teacher and learner are exchanged. The teacher also learns from the learner. The development project personnel learn from the participants. Both systems change.

Two way communication presents concurrent but usually dissimilar paradigms or reality constructs. In other words, it highlights two disparate views of truth. The more continuous the two way communication the greater the possibility that paradigms will shift closer to each other. If one accepts that truth is simply a different way of looking at reality and not an absolute value, than the learning process and an ability to problem solve should be viewed in a different way (Sinnott, in press). Effective two way communication involves more than expressing one's viewpoints; it connotes an ability to listen, analyze, exchange, reevaluate, and incorporate other views into one's own conceptual framework. This seems to require, at least on the part of one of the parties, (the facilitator) relativistic thinking and an ability to move among mutually contradictory frames of reference which in turn leads to the development of the most expansive problem solving space and a cognitive structure capable of accomodating such solutions.

Not all people can operate on the higher levels of interpretive complexity, or from a relativistic perspective, but all people appear to move among their own cognitive levels

dependent on the situation and interaction with others (Basseches, 1984; Ford, 1987). It appears that through the communication process itself and the resulting conflict and recognition on the part of the receiver of incongruity between what was received and the complexity of the communication sent, a gradual shift to more complex modes of thinking may occur. If this is true then by increasing two way communication the opportunities for expanding problem solving space and reordering cognitive frameworks toward relativistic thought increases.

Whether or not it is possible to help people operate at a higher cognitive level remains to be seen for little research has been conducted in this area. It is more likely, however, that people can be helped to recognize that there are different levels of reasoning and that their level of empathy and self confidence can be increased to allow the restructuring of thinking in more complex ways leading to the development of new paradigms. Without a constant flow of two way communication and a recognition of the varying paradigms, no true consensus on goals or outcomes can be reached among all of the parties. The internalization of such a consensus and the acceptance and incorporation of compromise paradigms are an indication of complex cognitive thought (Arlin, 1984; Kramer, 1989; Riegel, 1976) and constitute the basis for long term behavioral change. People who are able to define their own needs, who have an equal say in the decision-making process that attempts to resolve those needs, and who share reality constructs with common goals or outcomes will be the ones who accept

development projects and internalize those goals.

Few development project personnel solicit thoughts and ideas from the participants at any stage of the project, and the expressed needs of the participants are rarely taken into account when projects are formulated. Two way communication is not usually thought of as an essential component of a development project and mechanisms that would promote this communication are not generally incorporated into a project. Participant cooperative groups might be one mechanism for promoting two way communication. Cooperative groups, however, do not generally have any input into the planning stages of projects, nor is there an acknowledgement that this might be important. Generally there is no mechanism that encourages dialogue among the project participants or between the cooperative group members and the project staff during the course of the project. The dialogue that does occur is usually interpersonal communication between group members and the facilitator or field staff but this is not necessarily conveyed to any other project personnel. If two way communication is believed to be essential to a successful development project then it is necessary to consider, develop and incorporate mechanisms that will encourage such communication within development projects.

INTEGRATION MECHANISMS

As previously suggested, two way communication between project participants and staff could be enhanced by providing more time for more project personnel to interact and dialogue with

cooperative groups. Since time, energy and resources are always limited, another alternative would be to encourage two way communication through the use of videotapes. Cooperative group sessions could be videotaped and then viewed by project staff and other cooperative group members. Likewise, project staff and meetings could be videotaped and shared with the participants. Each group could react to the other's comments and viewpoints. This communication could extend to the national government leaders and donor agency personnel. Using lightweight, portable, battery-operated camcorders, it would be possible to visually and orally communicate. Videotapes of the proposed project site and of discussions with potential project participants could be used by donor agency personnel and national government staff as they plan future projects. There are numerous ways in which two way communication could occur and the needs, ideas and suggestions of the participants be incorporated into and integrated with the objectives and methodology of development programs, but first it must be acknowledged that this is important and a commitment must be made to do so.

CONCLUSION

This paper suggests that three major factors in the success of international development projects are: 1) an agreement on the part of the donor agency, national government and participants as to the objectives of the project; 2) a belief on the part of the participants that the project is theirs too, not something that is

being foisted upon them, and that they can input their ideas and actions into it and affect the direction and implementation of the project; and 3) that the participants are willing to change and that the nested systems of which they are a part are flexible encough to permit such change. Development projects should no longer be viewed strictly as a technological transfer process but as a cross cultural change process in which the roles of the participants and project staff need to be reexamined and redefined. It is necessary not only to provide participants with technical information and hardware but also to help them develop the necessary skills and tools to identify and solve problems.

The change agent needs to become a facilitator who by operating at complex cognitive levels in group situations can bridge realities among participants and between participants and others, including project staff. Since the facilitator is a critical component to the success of development projects, there is a need to reassess the role of the facilitator and the requisite qualifications and characteristics of such a person. Training programs for potential facilitators should be explored.

The role of participants has changed from subject or target to participant. If what is desired is long term behavioral change on the part of the participants, then they must identify their needs, problems, and desires and dialogue with project staff about them and integrate solutions into all stages of the development project. The formulation of small cooperative groups with a project mentoring facilitator appears to be one successful way of

helping participants identify and solve problems.

The importance of two way communication between participants and project staff must be recognized and mechanisms for promoting and actualizing two way communication between participants and project staff must be developed and utilized. Videorecordings of participant and project staff group interactions to be viewed by each group is one suggested mechanism. It is recommended that other mechanisms be explored and tested.

International development projects have evolved over time and will continue to do so as long as there is a commitment to sharing the resources and knowledge of the world among all people. The challenge is to be able to do this in a more effective, viable way, so that all those involved in a development project learn from it in a constructive way and benefit from the experience.

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